

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM**

(Type all entries - complete applicable sections)

STATE: Virginia	
COUNTY: Prince William	
FOR NPS USE ONLY	
ENTRY NUMBER	DATE

**1. NAME**

COMMON:  
Bel Air

AND/OR HISTORIC:  
Bel Air

**2. LOCATION**

STREET AND NUMBER:  
.9 mi. W of Rt. 640, .6 mi. N of intersection with Rt. 610.

CITY OR TOWN:  
(Minnieville vic.)

STATE: Virginia CODE: 45 COUNTY: Prince William CODE: 153

**3. CLASSIFICATION**

CATEGORY (Check One)	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	ACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC
<input type="checkbox"/> District <input type="checkbox"/> Site <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Building <input type="checkbox"/> Structure <input type="checkbox"/> Object	<input type="checkbox"/> Public <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Private <input type="checkbox"/> Both	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Occupied <input type="checkbox"/> Unoccupied <input type="checkbox"/> Preservation work in progress <input type="checkbox"/> In Process <input type="checkbox"/> Being Considered	Yes: <input type="checkbox"/> Restricted <input type="checkbox"/> Unrestricted <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No

PRESENT USE (Check One or More as Appropriate)

<input type="checkbox"/> Agricultural <input type="checkbox"/> Commercial <input type="checkbox"/> Educational <input type="checkbox"/> Entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> Government <input type="checkbox"/> Industrial <input type="checkbox"/> Military <input type="checkbox"/> Museum	<input type="checkbox"/> Park <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Private Residence <input type="checkbox"/> Religious <input type="checkbox"/> Scientific	<input type="checkbox"/> Transportation <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) _____ <input type="checkbox"/> Comments _____
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**4. OWNER OF PROPERTY**

OWNER'S NAME:  
William E. S. Flory

STREET AND NUMBER:  
Route I Box 862

CITY OR TOWN: Woodbridge STATE: Virginia CODE: 45

**5. LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.:  
Prince William County Court House

STREET AND NUMBER:

CITY OR TOWN? Manassas STATE: Virginia CODE: 45

**6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE OF SURVEY:  
Historic American Buildings Survey, File 76-1

DATE OF SURVEY: 1936 ☒ Federal ☐ State ☐ County ☐ Local

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS:  
Library of Congress

STREET AND NUMBER:

CITY OR TOWN: Washington STATE: District of Columbia CODE: 08

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

STATE: Virginia

COUNTY: Prince William

ENTRY NUMBER

DATE

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## 7. DESCRIPTION

CONDITION	(Check One)					
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> Good	<input type="checkbox"/> Fair	<input type="checkbox"/> Deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> Ruins	<input type="checkbox"/> Unexposed
	(Check One)			(Check One)		
	<input type="checkbox"/> Altered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Unaltered	<input type="checkbox"/> Moved	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Original Site		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (If known) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Supposedly built in 1740 on the basement of an earlier house, Bel Air is a brick, one-and-one-half story structure set on a high stone foundation with minute dormers and an enormous exterior end chimney on the western end which contrasts with the small interior end chimney on the east end. The brickwork is laid for the most part in Flemish bond. However, on the north facade, considerable rebuilding is obvious and on the east end the bond lapses, at times, into five-course American bond. The south facade has four bays with two of the windows to the west of the central doorway and one to the east. These windows are of the narrow eighteenth-century shape and, although the nine-over-nine sash is correct in theme, it is a replacement. The north front is a symmetrical five-bays wide, but the openings approach a square in shape and, along with obvious rebuilding of much of the wall, do not date from the eighteenth century. Photographs published in 1931 show the tiny dormers, certainly a standard feature in early structures, to be present only on the south front, but these awkward creatures appear today on both broad slopes. Both porches have been changed since 1931, the most notable replacement being the removal of a classical entrance porch in lieu of an unsheltered stone one with side stairs on the south front. Large windows in the stone basement have been partially let into the wall above and topped by brick segmental arches.

The central hall plan features a small open stair hall at the north end and to the west of the entranceway, and, although the robust rail seems quite right for the period, the balusters are a bit slender for a 1740 date. This stair area is separated from the rest of the hall by an archway whose reeded supports might date from the same period as the balusters. The northeast room has been altered in the mid-nineteenth century, but the other rooms have mid-eighteenth century paneling. The most notable feature in the house is the wooden partition between the southwest room and the hall which is supposedly removeable to create a larger area. Complete with paneling above and below the chair rail and two glazed casement windows in the wall, this design is extraordinary.

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

## B. SIGNIFICANCE

## PERIOD (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- ☐ Pre-Columbian    ☐ 16th Century    ☒ 18th Century    ☐ 20th Century  
☐ 15th Century    ☐ 17th Century    ☐ 19th Century

## SPECIFIC DATE(S) (If Applicable and Known)

## AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- |   |  |  |  |
|---|--|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Aboriginal     | <input type="checkbox"/> Education             | <input type="checkbox"/> Political           | <input type="checkbox"/> Urban Planning                            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Prehistoric    | <input type="checkbox"/> Engineering           | <input type="checkbox"/> Religion/Philosophy | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) <u>History</u> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Historic       | <input type="checkbox"/> Industry              | <input type="checkbox"/> Science             |  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Agriculture    | <input type="checkbox"/> Invention             | <input type="checkbox"/> Sculpture           |  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Architecture   | <input type="checkbox"/> Landscape             | <input type="checkbox"/> Social/Humanitarian |  |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Art | <input type="checkbox"/> Architecture          | <input type="checkbox"/> Theater             |  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Commerce       | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Literature | <input type="checkbox"/> Transportation      |  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Communications | <input type="checkbox"/> Military              |  |  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Conservation   | <input type="checkbox"/> Music                 |  |  |

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Bel Air is thought to have been built by Captain Charles Ewell (1713-?) who married Sarah Ball, daughter of Major James and Mary (Conway Dangerfield) Ball of Bewdley, Lancaster County, in 1736. Thus the Ewells were closely related to the family of George Washington's mother, Mary (Ball) Washington. Colonel Jesse Ewell (1743-1805), eldest son of Captain Charles Ewell, inherited the property, and in 1795 his daughter Frances (1775-1843) married Mason Locke Weems (1759-1825), the first biographer of George Washington. In 1808 or 1809 Weems and his family moved from their home near Dumfries to Bel Air, taking over the house partly to satisfy loans Weems had made to Mrs. Ewell. Weems purchased the remainder of the property upon her death in 1823. After Weems's death the house passed through the Ewell family to Weems's cousins who soon left it, and the house has stood empty for long periods of time.

Born at Marshes Seat near Herring Bay, Anne Arundel County, Maryland, on October 11, 1759, Mason Locke Weems was admitted to the Episcopal priesthood in 1784, serving two parishes in Maryland from 1784 to 1792. By 1793 he had given up a settled rectorship and had become active as a book agent for Matthew Carey of Philadelphia. Although Bel Air was officially his home for the last fifteen years of his life, he spent most of his time traveling up and down the eastern seaboard peddling his books. He is best remembered as the author of The Life and Memorable Actions of George Washington, first published anonymously circa 1800. This work has gone through more than seventy accredited and varying editions, including five in German, from 1800 to 1927. In the fifth edition (1806), the famous story of the cherry tree made its debut. The fact that "Parson" Weems had preached in several Virginia parishes for a short time, including Pohick Church (after Washington had ceased to attend there) was the basis for his claim, in the 1809 edition, that the author was "Formerly Rector of Mt. Vernon Parish."

In addition to his moralistic tracts and pamphlets, Weems is remembered for his biography of General Francis Marion (1809), loosely based on material provided by Peter Horry, one of Marion's lieutenants. Weems died in Beaufort, South Carolina, in 1825, and his remains were later brought back to Bel Air where he was laid to rest in the family cemetery.

Architecturally, Bel Air is a fascinating study of structural evolution within the confines of a house measuring 38' x 51'. It is quite possible that the stone foundations date from an earlier period than

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8. 1740, as is traditionally held, and it seems obvious that the nineteenth century played freely with the changes in the masonry walls and some interior detailing. Fortunately, Bel Air has not been greatly hurt by these efforts and, in fact, gains a certain dignity and stature for having retained its architectural composure.

6. Historic American Buildings Survey Inventory  
1959 Federal  
Library of Congress  
Washington, D. C. Code: 08

Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission Report #76-1  
1969 State  
Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission  
Room 1116, Ninth Street State Office Building  
Richmond, Virginia Code: 45

# 9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Dictionary of American Biography, Vol. 19 (1943), pp. 604-605.  
 Ewell, Alice Maude, A Virginia Scene, or Life in Old Prince William.  
 Lynchburg, Va.: J. P. Bell Company, Inc., 1931.  
 Hayden, Rev. Horace Edwin, Virginia Genealogies. Baltimore: Southern Book Co., 1959.  
 Kellock, Harold, Parson Weems of the Cherry Tree. New York: The Century Co., 1928.  
Prince William; The Story of Its People and Its Places. Compiled in 1941 by the Writers Program of the Work Projects Administration and sponsored by The Bethlehem Good Housekeeping Club. Richmond, Va.: 1961.

# 10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING A RECTANGLE LOCATING THE PROPERTY			LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING THE CENTER POINT OF A PROPERTY OF LESS THAN TEN ACRES		
CORNER	LATITUDE	LONGITUDE	LATITUDE		LONGITUDE
	Degrees Minutes Seconds	Degrees Minutes Seconds	Degrees	Minutes	Seconds
NW	38 ° 38 ' 52 "	77 ° 22 ' 05 "			
NE	38 ° 38 ' 52 "	77 ° 21 ' 07 "			
SE	38 ° 38 ' 02 "	77 ° 21 ' 07 "			
SW	38 ° 38 ' 02 "	77 ° 22 ' 05 "			

APPROXIMATE ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY: 225 acres

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE:	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE

# 11. FORM PREPARED BY

NAME AND TITLE:	
Staff, Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission, James W. Moody, Jr., Director	
ORGANIZATION	DATE
Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission	November 14, 1969
STREET AND NUMBER:	
Room 1116, Ninth Street State Office Building	
CITY OR TOWN:	STATE
Richmond	Virginia
	CODE
	45

# 12. STATE LIAISON OFFICER CERTIFICATION

# NATIONAL REGISTER VERIFICATION

As the designated State Liaison Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service. The recommended level of significance of this nomination is:

National ☒ State ☐ Local ☐

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Dr. Edward P. Alexander, Chairman  
 Title Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission

Date \_\_\_\_\_

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register.

Chief, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation

Date \_\_\_\_\_

ATTEST:

Keeper of The National Register

Date \_\_\_\_\_

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

